



Decision Memorandum

Steep Creek Logs Large Woody Debris



USDA Forest Service, Northern Region
Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests
North Fork Ranger District
Clearwater County, Idaho

I. Background

The North Fork District Ranger proposes to construct logjam structures within the active channel of Beaver Creek, Isabella Creek, Skull Creek, and/or Quartz Creek located in the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forests, Clearwater County, Idaho at Township 40 North, Range 7 East, Sections 6-7; Township 40 North, Range 8 East, Sections 4, 5, 8, 15, & 16; and Township 41 North, Range 7 East, Sections 20 and 29-31 (see attached map).

II. Purpose and Need

The project area includes the lower reaches of Beaver Creek, Isabella Creek, Skull Creek, and Quartz Creek and adjacent riparian areas (see map). The recruitment and future supply of large woody debris has been modified in the project area due to riparian trees being removed during road construction and/or removal for road maintenance. As a result, the stream reaches and riparian zones (with the possible exception of Beaver Creek) are deficient in instream and riparian woody debris. This has reduced instream habitat quality for aquatic organisms and resulted in channel modification at high flow volumes.

The purpose of the project is to improve instream habitat complexity/quality for aquatic organisms, particularly ESA "Threatened" bull trout and Region 1 Sensitive Westslope cutthroat and redband trout, in the lower reaches of up to four tributaries of the North Fork Clearwater River. The need for the project is to mitigate for the removal (for road maintenance and protection) of debris and flow-delivered logs from Beaver Creek and its riparian habitat, due to the Steep Creek debris flow of March 2017. In addition, but to a lesser extent, the project is needed to mitigate for the maintenance of Forest Service (FS) system roads along the lower reaches of the other three project area streams.

Decision

I have decided to approve the Steep Creek Logs LWD project with the following terms and conditions.

The North Fork Ranger District will construct logjam structures within the active channel of Beaver Creek, Isabella Creek, Skull Creek, and/or Quartz Creek. A total of two to 10 sites, distributed between the four creeks, will be identified for logjam construction, with one to two structures (5 to 20 logs each) proposed at each site, for a total of 4 - 20 structures. It is anticipated that one or two structures could be constructed per day during project implementation. Depending on funding, logjam structures may not be constructed in all four creeks. The project will be completed through a contract under direct supervision of the North Zone Fisheries Biologist.

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Project sites will be adjacent to (typically within 25-100 feet of) FS system roads. The specific sites, to be determined in 2018, will be based on site characteristics. Sites on Beaver Creek and Isabella Creek will be prioritized, in part, because implementation will be facilitated by their physical proximity to the log storage site (see below).

Following the 2017 Steep Creek debris flow, the deposited material blocking FS Road 247 was cleared and the wood removed from the Beaver Creek channel to prevent the creek from cutting into and further threatening the road prism. The 80 or so salvaged logs (~20 feet or greater in length) currently stored on the shoulder of FS Road 247 and directly adjacent to Beaver Creek will be used for logjam construction.

Approximately 1/3rd of the logs retain their rootwads and/or are of substantial length (> 40 feet) or diameter (> 2 feet) will be used as “key” logs to anchor the logjams. Incorporating stream channel and riparian features, such as bedrock, boulders, existing woody debris, standing trees, etc., will also help anchor the structures. Smaller (but still substantial) logs will be combined with the key logs to complete the structures. Excavation of the streambank or cables, metal pins, or driven pilings will not be used to supplement the stability of the structures.

The stockpiled logs (which may be relocated in the interim to the grounds of the Canyon Work Center) will be transported on log trucks or self-loaders to the project sites on Forest Service system roads. An excavator or similar equipment will be used to place the logs in the stream channel/riparian zone. The excavator would typically not enter the wetted stream channel during logjam construction, but instream operations may occur if allowed under ESA consultation. In addition to the excavator, block and tackle/winches may be used to place/manipulate the logs. Chainsaws and non-powered tools such as pickbars, shovels, and come-alongs may also be used to construct the logjam structures.

Ground disturbance will be confined to excavator tracks and placement/manipulation of the logs. Some vegetation disturbance will occur where off-road (excavator) travel is necessary and during log manipulation. Effects to vegetation should be imperceptible after a few growing seasons. Some trees may be damaged or will need to be felled during implementation. This will be avoided if practical, but any damaged or felled trees could be incorporated into logjam structures.

The logs will be individually numbered with aluminum tags and the structures photographed upon their completion. This will allow the structures to be monitored overtime to determine/demonstrate the stability and degree of channel modification achieved by the structures.

Programmatic consultation with NOAA Fisheries and US Fish and Wildlife Service, as well as obtaining a 404 permit from the Army Corps of Engineers and an Idaho Department of Water Resources Stream Alteration Permit will occur prior to the work starting.

All appropriate Best Management Practices (National Core 2012 BMPs) and Terms and Conditions and Design Criteria in the Idaho Restoration Programmatic BO (NOAA and FWS) will be followed. In addition, the claimant will be required to:

- The excavator will be cleaned and inspected as “weed free” prior to any instream work.
- In the unlikely event of a broken hose only bio-based hydraulic oils will be allowed.

- Access to and the limits of excavator work will be flagged, with excavating limited to only that required to match stream bottom elevations to allow perennial flow through the side channel.
- Invasive plant species will be treated within the work area prior to the project implementation and monitored and treated, where necessary, after the project was completed.
- Disturbed riparian areas will be planted with appropriate shrub species, such as willow stakes, to encourage riparian vegetation establishment.
- Areas disturbed by excavator tracks will be seeded with an appropriate native seed mix.
- Mechanical support will follow BMPs for fuel storage and machinery fueling.
- The contractor will have fuel spill containment supplies onsite in the event of a fuel spill, and its employees trained in the proper application and use of those materials.

Project Implementation: Depending on funding, the project is expected to be completed in 2018. The work will be implemented within the NOAA and FWS designated 'fish window' (July through September), and will take up to two weeks to complete, depending on conditions.

III. Rationale for Decision and Reasons for Categorically Excluding the Decision

A. Category of Exclusion and Rationale for Using the Category

Based on information in this document and the project record, I have determined that no extraordinary circumstances affecting resource conditions exist (36 CFR 220.6), that this project may be categorically excluded from documentation in an EA or EIS, and that it meets all the criteria outlined for 36 CFR 220.6(e) (19): *Removing and/or relocating debris and sediment following disturbance events (such as floods, hurricanes, tornados, mechanical/ engineering failures, etc.) to restore uplands, wetlands, or riparian systems to pre-disturbance conditions, to the extent practicable, such that site conditions will not impede or negatively alter natural processes.*

The rationale for my decision is based on: (1) the proposed action fully meeting the criteria for Categorical Exclusions, (2) the proposed action meeting the purpose and need, (3) the findings related to extraordinary circumstances, discussed below, (4) the project's consistency with laws and regulations, including the Forest Plan, and (5) my review of the project record.

B. Finding of the Absence of Significant Adverse Effects to Extraordinary Circumstances

Based on the findings for resource conditions described below, I have determined that no extraordinary circumstances are associated with my decision. Forest Service direction at 36 CFR 220.6(b) describes the resource conditions that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstance related to the proposed action warrant further analysis and documentation in an EIS or EA.

Additionally, 36 CFR 220.6(b) states, "*The mere presence of one of more of these resource conditions does not preclude use of a categorical exclusion. It is the existence of a cause-effect relationship between a proposed action and the potential effect on these resource conditions and if such a relationship exists, the degree of the potential effect of a proposed action on these resource conditions that determines whether extraordinary circumstances exist.*"

1. Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species.

The Forest Interdisciplinary (ID) Team Wildlife Biologist, Fisheries Biologist and Botanist have determined the project would have no significant effects to federally listed and R1 Sensitive wildlife, fish and plant species and/or their habitats. Therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified for these resources.

The District received informal concurrence from U.S. Fish and Wild Service on April 12th, 2018 regarding a “not likely to adversely affect” Esndangered Species Act (ESA) determination for bull trout and bull trout Critical Habitat for implementing the project in Beaver Creek. If logjam sites on other streams are chosen, additional ESA consultation may be necessary.

2. Floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds.

The Forest Hydrologist determined no significant effects to floodplains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds are expected for this project. The project is consistent with all applicable State and Federal water quality laws, and with soil and water standards in the Clearwater National Forest Plan, including the PACFISH amendment. Based on this analysis, no extraordinary circumstances were identified regarding floodplains, wetlands, and municipal watersheds.

3. Congressionally designated areas, such as wilderness, wilderness study areas or national recreation areas.

The project area is not located in any congressionally designated area, and therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to these resources.

4. Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas.

The project is not located within any Roadless Areas, Idaho Roadless Areas, or potential wilderness areas, and therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to these resources.

5. Research Natural Areas.

The project area is not located in any research natural area, and therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to this resource.

6. American Indians and Alaska native religious or cultural sites.

The Forest Cultural Resource Specialist has determined the above project has little likelihood to adversely affect historic properties, assuming such properties were present. As a result, a *No Inventory Decision* has been made, and no extraordinary circumstances were identified to these resources.

7. Archaeological sites, or historical properties or areas.

The Idaho State Historic Preservation Officer, or the Forest Archaeologist via the use of the North Idaho Programmatic Agreement, has determined that no archaeological or historic property will be adversely affected by this project. Therefore, no extraordinary circumstances were identified to these resources.

IV. Interested and Affected Agencies, Organizations, and Persons Contacted

On January 29, 2018, letters providing information and seeking public comment were mailed to individuals, organizations, state and local agencies, and the Nez Perce Tribe. Project information was

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also available at <http://www.fs.usda.gov/nezperce> under NEPA projects. A legal notice appeared in the Lewiston Tribune on January 30, 2018, inviting comments for 14 days from publication. One response was received during the scoping period, and the comments are addressed in Appendix A below. The original letter is available in the project record.


V. Findings Required by Other Laws

Based on my review of the actions associated with this project, I find that the Major Fenn Side Channel Reconnection Project is consistent with applicable Federal, state and local laws and regulations, including the standards and guidelines contained in the 1987 Clearwater National Forest Plan, as amended, as required by the National Forest Management Act of 1976.

VI. Contact Person

Questions regarding this decision should be sent to Jeff Chynoweth, Small NEPA Team Coordinator, c/o Nez Perce-Clearwater NFs Supervisor's Office, 903 Third Street, Kamiah, Idaho 83536; 208-935-4260 or FAX 208-935-4275.

VII. Signature of Deciding Officer



ANDREW M. SKOWLUND
District Ranger
North Fork Ranger District

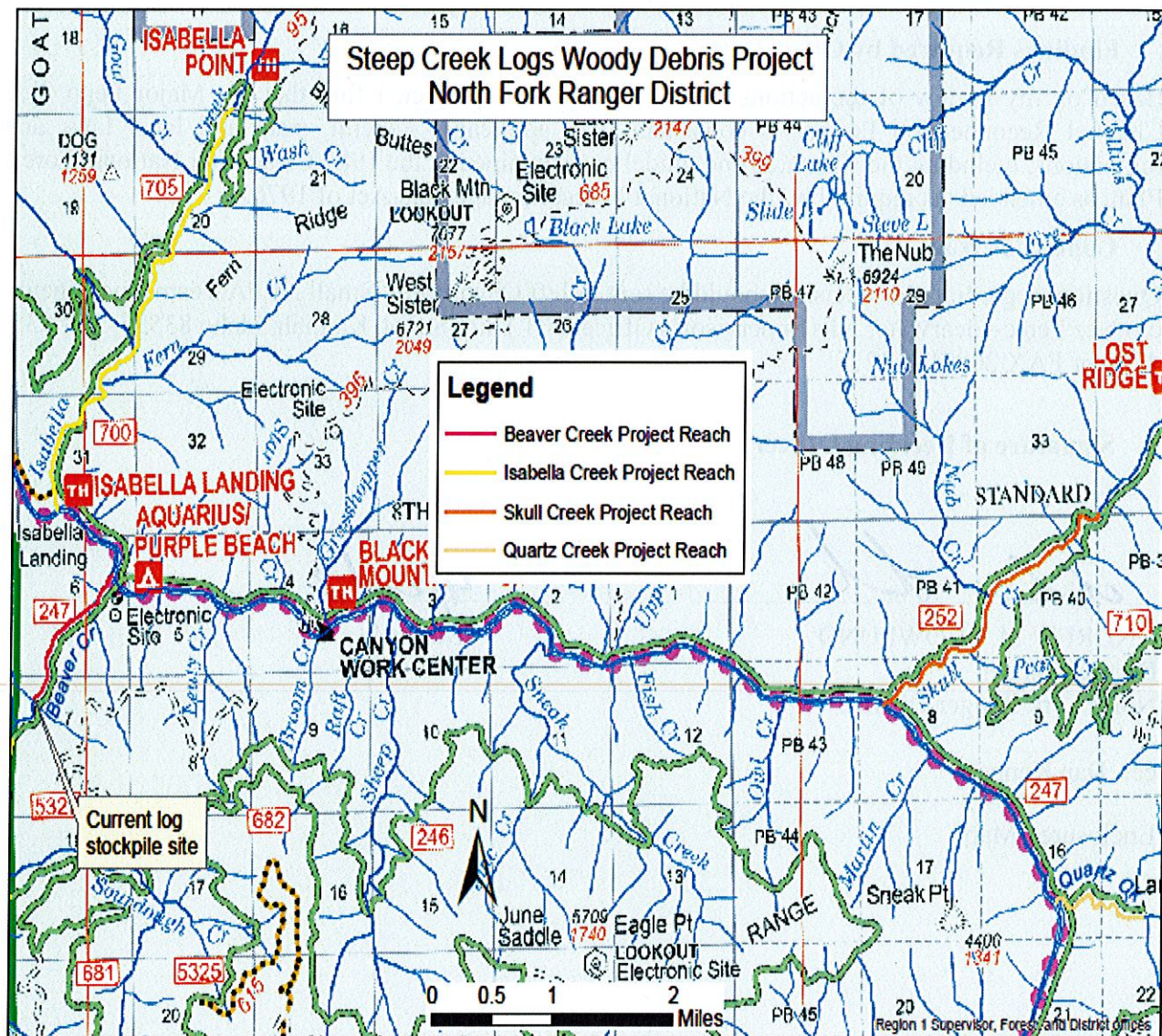

Date

cc: Dan Kenney

Enclosure: Map

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Map of Steep Creek Logs LWD Project



Appendix A

Analysis of Scoping Comments

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One comment for the project was received during the public comment period of January 31, 2018 to February 13, 2018. The disposition of the comment is found in the Table below. The original comment letter is available in the project record.

Comment Analysis

Commenter	Comment	Disposition
Brad Smith, Idaho Conservation League	The Idaho Conservation League supports this project.	Thank you for your comment.

